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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the Australian perspective on a study conducted by the Consortium for Cross-Cultural Research in Education. Only 23 percent of the Australian teachers in the sample perceived the main objective of significant change as relating directly to their own work context. While most respondents saw themselves as "adapters" (63 percent) rather than "adopters" (3 percent), "compliers" (17 percent) or "resisters" (7 percent) in their response to educational change, internal changes attracted significantly more positive attitudes than did changes seen as originating externally. Almost half (47 percent) felt that the changes that had affected them most in their work were intended to serve the interests of students, teachers, or parents, while only 31 percent of the respondents claimed that these change had actually served these groups' interests. Teachers in the sample saw themselves in roughly equal proportions, playing supportive (29 percent), compliant (28 percent), and resistant (38 percent) roles in the processes involved with educational changes. Study findings suggested seven new realities for teachers at work: (1) significant expectations of change; (2) conflict between organizational and professional goals; (3) dissatisfaction with educational systems; (4) competition between two kinds of collaboration; (5) dissonance associated with a paradox of professional expertise and external control; (6) intensification; and (7) options for distance and immunity. The issue of how teachers will respond to the imperatives of the future is paramount among several implications of the study. (Contains 10 references.) (ND)

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EDUCATIONAL CHANGE AND THE NEW REALITIES OF TEACHERS' WORK LIVES : AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the Australian perspective on the study conducted in the countries under the auspices of the Consortium for Cross-Cultural Research in Education.

In the main body of the paper, the propositions developed from the inter-country data analysis conducted by the Consortium are discussed in terms of how these relate to the Australia context.

- **Australian Society and Education in the 1990s**

By the mid 1990s, the social, economic and political organisation of Australian society was embroiled in a continuing process of profound restructuring. Contemporary commentators, such as Mackay in *Reinventing Australia* (1993) and Suter in *Where Did It All Go Wrong?* (1993), identified the emerging society as characterised by cost reduction pressures; by the opening up of domestic markets through tariff reductions; by the failure of new technologies to deliver on the promise of job creation; by the privatisation of state enterprises; by the paradox of a highly educated workforce in a context of entrenched levels of unemployment; by conflict between the twin imperatives of economic development and of environmental concerns; by a re-examination of Australian cultural identity in a context of multiculturalism; and by an overall decline in Australians' standards of living, associated with the emergence of a three-tiered social structure consisting of a relatively small but growing class of wealthy citizens, a large but shrinking middle class, and a large and growing class of the newly poor. Nevertheless, despite all efforts and intentions to the contrary, by 1994 Australia remained less affluent and less competitive than government, and business in particular, desired.

As they collectively constituted a key arm of government, Australian education systems, and the State systems in particular, were simultaneously both driven by and helped to drive this seemingly radical vision of a restructured Australia. The projected link between the nature and purpose of education and the development of Australia into a modern, competitive, globalised society was made directly in Prime

Minister Hawke's now-cliched notion of "the clever country" in 1990 which, in turn, helped to set the agenda for the oft-cited Finn (1991), Mayer (1992) and Carmichael (1992) reports. The overall vision was one of lifelong learning, with school systems projected to have a focus on developing traditional literacy and numeracy skills, vocational preparation and multi-skilling, and an orientation towards innovation, flexibility and enterprise.

From the late 1980s Australia's federal and state government departments in general, and state education systems in particular, came under significant pressure for increased productivity as a direct result of the fiscal stringencies generated by Australia's macro-economic situation and perceived lack of international competitiveness. Hence, at the very time that Australian society was being shaped within the maelstrom of upheaval associated with what Toffler (1985, 1991) described as a change from a manufacturing society to an information society and what Hargreaves (1994) saw as the emergence of the postmodern age, education systems were coming to be increasingly accountable for their performance and for the outcomes which resulted from their endeavours. These pressures took the form of a general concern for responsiveness and for quality in educational operations and outcomes. These concerns were made manifest through cuts in government funding levels; through the decentralisation or devolution of much operational decision-making to local district and school levels; through the establishment of tighter systemic review procedures; and through federal curriculum initiatives in areas judged to be of national importance. In this latter area, the promotion of vocational preparation and the development of national curriculum statements and profiles were both significant and indicative.

At the systemic level, Australian state education authorities responded most visibly to the multitude of pressures for change through the announcement of a plethora of new policies and guidelines for teachers and schools. In April 1989, near the beginning of the period covered by this study, the Australian Education Council (a body consisting of the federal and state ministers of education, together with senior officials representing the education departments of each of the respective public service bureaucracies) issued the statement which came to be known as the *Hobart Declaration*

on Schooling, in which ten common and agreed goals for schooling in Australia were proclaimed. In November of the same year, the South Australian Education Department issued a new plan for the next triennium in which a review of junior secondary education was announced and the establishment of a restructured model for the final two years of secondary schooling was affirmed. At much the same time, the Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts identified four major goals in the then current version of its corporate plan; including an intention to improve learning programs in schools through new policies for both primary and secondary education, through encouraging students' participation in education beyond Year 10 and through measures designed to provide educational and social justice for all students (DEET, 1990). For the remainder of the period 1989-94, the scant half-decade covered in this study, the expectation that education systems would be responsive to a changing set of educational needs in Australia generated an ever-increasing flow of statements detailing new priorities for, and consequent expectations of, teachers and schools. Indeed, by 1995, the four goals identified by the Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts only five years earlier had escalated to 21 curriculum priorities, to which needed to be added the national agenda for the education of girls and responses to the implications of a revamped State Education Act with its attendant regulations.

The simultaneous co-existence of so many dramatic pressures on state education in Australia produced, as was the case in many other settings, a volatile situation characterised, according to Hargreaves (1995), by a number of paradoxes, each of which had significant implications for the work of teachers in schools. By the mid 1990s teachers were being expected to operate within an increasingly complex and contradictory milieux. Their work was conducted in a dissonant context, with some of the more notable paradoxes identified (Hargreaves, 1995: 14-15) as including: parents failing to support the priorities they wished schools to pursue; business failing to utilise the skills it claimed to want in school leavers; parochial national curricula being developed in a context of increasing globalisation; standardised testing and common curricula being promoted in an increasingly diverse and multicultural society; and orientations both toward the future and toward a world of change being promoted at a time of increased nostalgia for the clearer choices supposedly associated with the less complex times of the past.

That the turbulent times of the late 1980s and early 1990s had produced considerable difficulties for teachers did not escape the notice of state education ministers or federal officials. However, both the ministerial members of the Australian Education Council and the Australian government saw the appropriate response to these problems as one which addressed structural, rather than personal, issues. A profound change in the structure of the teaching profession was promoted as the pathway through which to address issues related to the quality of teaching and learning:

> The morale, career paths and conditions of the teaching force are of major concern to employing authorities and to the Australian Government. Award restructuring for all sectors of the economy is a key strategy of the Australian Government's agenda for micro-economic reform. The need to change workplace practices and improve the efficiency of all industries, including education and schooling is crucial for Australia's economic future. The award restructuring process aims to achieve enhanced quality teaching, improved career and training opportunities for teachers and develop more efficient and effective schools.
>
> (DEET, 1990: 63)

Thus the beginning of the 1990s was marked as a time when the links between education and industry were to be seen as having important implications for both teachers' teaching and students' learning in Australian schools. One of the more visible signs of the expectation that education would prepare students more fully for effective participation in the workforce, while itself performing more productively in an industrial sense, was an increased emphasis on vocational preparation across the curriculum. Australia's teachers, for so long derided for their lack of experience in the "real world" of work, became responsible, not only for quality and productivity in their own work, but for the capacity of their students to meet the vocational competency expectations of Australian industry. Yet this was only one of a multiplicity of change pressures which were all impacting on the work of Australian teachers at the time of this study.

The Propositions of Cross-Cultural Study in the Australian Context

I. *Changes attributed to sources internal to the school are likely to have more favourable consequences for both teachers and their students than changes*

attributed to external sources. (More favourable consequences = stronger impact on teachers' worklife, more positive effect on professional development, stronger effect on students' learning, more positive feelings about the change, more interested in responsible involvement in a similar change, more receptiveness to involvement in further change in general.)

In Australia the strength of the impact of a change on teachers' work lives was not necessarily perceived as favourable. Changes perceived as having negative impacts (or unfavourable consequences) were reported as being no less strong in impact than were those changes which were perceived to have had a favourable impact overall as originating from internal sources (only 16% of all nominated changes) such as the adoption of whole-school behaviour management processes, were perceived much more positively than were those changes perceived as originating from external sources, such as the results stemming from wide-ranging systemic cuts to the funding of schools.

II. *Increased feelings of ownership of a change by teachers are likely to produce a stronger impact of the change on their worklives, a more positive effect on their professional development, more positive feelings about the change, more receptiveness to responsible involvement in similar change in the future, more receptiveness to involvement in further change in general, and a more strongly perceived effect on students' learning.*

Only 23% of the Australian teachers in the sample perceived the main objective of the significant change as relating directly to their own work context. Similarly there was a significant difference ($p = <.0001$) between the degree of influence teachers felt they could exercise in decision-making related to changes from internal, as compared to external sources. Furthermore, changes perceived as originating internally attracted a significantly ($p = .002$) higher level of commitment from these teachers than did changes which were perceived to originate from external sources.

While the overwhelming majority of Australian respondents saw themselves as "adapters" (63%) rather than "adopters" (3%), "compliers" (17%) or resisters (7%) in

their response to educational change involvement with internal changes (seen as more owned by teachers) attracted significantly more positive ($p = .004$) attitudes toward future changes than did involvement with changes seen as originating externally.

III. *School changes regarding content and/or method of teaching are likely to elicit more positive feelings from teachers than changes concerning assessment of student learning, school experience of students, or school system management.*

The teachers in the Australian sample (despite the study being conducted in the context of the development and dissemination of National Curriculum Statements and new State-based restructuring of senior secondary curricula and assessment) distinguished between matters affecting "teaching and learning" on the one hand, and "organisational" matters, on the other. Thus context and method changes which were determined (at least partially) individually, collaboratively or locally drew significantly more positive ($p = <.0001$) perceptions than did those changes to curricula and curricula structures and processes which were seen as determined outside the school.

IV. *School changes aimed at improving the academic experience of students are likely to elicit more positive feelings from teachers than changes aimed at improving the social or cultural experience of students.*

V. *Teachers who perceive a school change as having strong effects on students' learning are likely to feel more positive about the change and view their worklives as having been more strongly impacted by it than teachers who perceive the change as having weak effects on students' learning.*

In the Australian study 47% of teachers felt that the changes that had affected them most in their work were intended to serve the interests of either students, teachers or parents, while only 31% of the same respondents claimed that these changes had actually served these groups' interests. Furthermore, 9% of all respondents felt that there had been no beneficiaries at all from the cited changes.

Overall, interviewees saw these changes as most often serving organisational purposes, such as "managing the system better" or "saving money", while considerably less often being designed to "improve the quality of teachers' teaching or students' learning".

Changes aimed at improving the social/cultural experiences of students (such as even policy in the equity and social justice field) were not perceived as positively as changes aimed at improving students' academic experiences (such as the introduction of criterion-based assessment co-operative learning and student-centred curriculum).

VI. *When teachers' experience with a school change arouses their interest in taking a responsible role in further school change of a similar nature, they are likely to become more receptive to further changes in general.*

The Australian teachers in the sample saw themselves in roughly equal proportions, playing supportive (29%), compliant (28%) and resistant (38%) roles in the processes involved with educational changes. These teachers played significantly were supportive roles ($p = <.0001$) in "teaching and learning" changes and similarly significantly more supportive roles ($p = <.0008$) in changes originating from internal rather than external sources.

There was a strong positive correlation ($r = .55$, $p = .0001$) between the nature of the roles (supportive, compliant or resistant) played by Australian teaching in a current significant change and the nature of their likely response (more positive, uncertain or more negative) to the educational changes of the future.

Degree of commitment to the current change, satisfaction with key elements of work life and capacity to influence decision-making related to a current change were all positively correlated with the nature of teachers' predicted responses to future educational innovations.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The interview data gathered in the study indicate that, despite teachers' discourse being still rooted firmly in the genre of Fullan's *multiple innovations* era, there are a number of new realities for teachers at work in today's schools. Undeniably, it is clear that some of these realities have been part of teachers' working lives for a number of years, and are thus somewhat less 'new' than the others. However, it is the simultaneous co-existence of all seven factors that has important implications for teachers and their work lives in Australian state schools in the mid-1990s. The *seven new realities for teachers at work* are as follows:

1. A myriad of change expectations

The number of multiple, simultaneous innovations and change initiatives described earlier, and recognised by this study's teachers in both interview and survey contexts, shows no sign of abating. The pace of technological change, and the resultant pressure on schools and teachers to keep up, can only magnify the current level and complexity of change expectations facing teachers. Devolution of much decision-making from the administrative centre to the school level has done little to ameliorate problems experienced by teachers with changes they see as being imposed externally.

2. Conflict between organisational and professional goals

While teachers respond generally positively to curriculum initiatives and other innovations and expectations which have classroom activities as their focus, they respond negatively and with cynicism to new procedures and expectations which they see as serving the needs of the educational bureaucracy and diverting their own attention from their 'real teaching' tasks. The connections between increased accountability and documentation requirements on the one hand, and improved teaching and learning practices on the other, are not yet accepted fully in teachers' discourse.

3. Dissatisfaction with educational systems

These teachers expressed considerable dissatisfaction with, and alienation from, the actions of the systems which employ them. In particular, teachers viewed the two state systems' implementation expectations as unreasonable and at odds with teachers' perspectives in terms of time. Increased expectations in a context of reduced resource levels creates both problems and resentment between teachers and their employing systems. For the teachers in this study, therefore, their employers acted in ways which ignored fairness and commonsense, and seemed distant from day-to-day realities associated with teaching and learning. For many teachers, the systems were failing twice over: as poor employers and as disinterested educators.

4. Competition between two kinds of collaboration

While Hargreaves (1994) described the *contrived collegiality* that he saw as associated with devolution, this was only one of the two forms of collaboration common among teachers in this study. There is no denying that contrived collegiality is both common and transparent. However, teachers apparently afford little credibility to either the processes or the products associated with such decision-making. On the other hand, they set great value on the *mutually supportive collaboration* in which they engage in self-selecting groups. Teachers see this self-initiated form of collaboration as their most valuable source of professional assistance and as a source of personal and professional support in an educational climate characterised by low levels of esteem for teachers in the wider community.

5. Dissonance associated with a paradox of professional expertise and external control.

The apparent contradictions between the various expectations held of teachers in the current educational context has been well documented elsewhere (Hargreaves, 1995). While many of the paradoxes Hargreaves described were noted by teachers in this study, they expressed even more dissonance about matters related to expertise and control. At the very time when they saw themselves teaching better than ever before,

they were more constrained than ever before by curriculum decisions made by others and by documentation and accountability requirements. The levels of teacher expertise and professional freedom of judgement are not seen to be balanced appropriately.

6. Intensification

Cuts to teacher numbers and to other resource areas which have resulted in significant increases in the amount of work required of teachers, combined with compacted timelines and a broadening in the range of roles teachers are expected to play, offer further support for the perception of an intensification in teachers' work.

7. Ironic options for distance and immunity

As the teachers in this study aged and acquired a repertoire of pedagogic skills within which they could operate with some confidence, they laid increasing claims to professional autonomy, at least within the confines of their own classrooms. In the same time frame, in theory at least, devolution has afforded teachers considerable empowerment at the local level. Somewhat ironically, therefore, these teachers have seemingly become less susceptible to the exhortations of their superiors. They demonstrate this immunity by standing back from the implementation of many change initiatives, reserving for themselves the final decisions about whether or not innovations will be enacted at the classroom level.

These seven new realities of teachers' work constitute only a snapshot of the ever more complex world of the teacher at work. However, the picture of teachers' work presented in this snapshot is consistent with long-standing themes of the change literature. Furthermore, these new realities have significant implications for teachers and for teacher educators. The paper will address these in turn.

This study results in the light of the literature

The results of the current study are consistent with those which might be expected in the light of much of the burgeoning literature covering change in education. Three of the seminal ideas spanning the time frame of that literature from the 1970s to the present day (from, for example, Doyle & Ponder, 1977-78 to Fullan, 1995) and which might be paraphrased as follows: first, *you can't mandate what matters;* second, teachers will *adapt rather than adopt* innovations; and third, teachers will support only those innovations which they see as offering *practical benefits* for their own teaching or their students' learning, are all reflected continually in the tenor of teachers' responses across the whole sample in this study.

In essence, therefore, despite expressing concerns about the pace and number of educational changes with which they have to contend; despite expressing concerns about the educational worth and real motives underlying many change initiatives; and despite expressing concerns about increased workloads and stress resulting from the current educational change context, the teachers in this study emerge as survivors. What is more, they emerge as *autonomous* and *empowered survivors,* in the sense that what they do in their classrooms remains largely a matter only between themselves and their students and in the sense that they claim the right to ultimate decision-making in implementation matters at the classroom level. Furthermore, they maintain a continuing focus on their classroom activities as the core tasks of their profession.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the autonomy of the teacher's role and the empowerment afforded to those who occupy that role give today's teachers, or at least those who participated in this study, a form of *immunity* from what they might regard as the worst excesses of the current change context.

Implications for teachers and teacher educators

Of the many implications of these new realities of teachers' work, the issue of how teachers will respond to the imperatives of the future is paramount. Surely there can be no positive outcome if teachers simply lament the myriad of change expectations, divorce themselves from organisational goals, and retreat behind the closed doors of their classrooms as part of a struggle to hold back the tide of educational changes. Surely in those circumstances, they will be engulfed eventually. If, on the other hand, teachers can use their autonomy, immunity, expertise, mutual support and their focus on quality teaching and learning to influence the future of education at the enacted level, then the work of the teacher may well merit and receive appropriate recognition.

Teacher educators could be forgiven for feeling just as battered by the prevailing elements as do many of the teacher respondents in this study. For a number of years in Australia, teacher educators have been lambasted for being *out-of-touch with the classroom* on the one hand, and for *failing to devote attention to quality research* on the other. Indeed, the pressure for change in teacher education faculties is undeniably pervasive at a time when previously secure student numbers and faculty positions might now be best described as uncertain.

Without advocating yet another quiet revolution in teacher education, it is a reasonable observation that the great majority of preservice training of teachers concentrates on only the *caring professional* domain of a teacher's work; while the *organisational* domain is almost unrepresented in preservice curricula. Given that almost half of the educational changes identified by this study's teachers as having the strongest impact on their work fall into the organisational category, preservice teacher training programs should reflect a much broader conception of teachers' work.

Despite the calls of advocates of whole-school change and of Fullan (1993) among others, that "everyone must be a change agent", the reality evident in this study is that many teachers feel unprepared, unwilling or unskilled in and for the roles they occupy in their responses to change initiatives and directives. While there is, of course, an

extensive literature dealing with the management and effective implementation of change and innumerable courses are offered at the postgraduate level to cater for potential leaders of educational change processes, there is very little available for teachers who seek the skills, strategies and understandings necessary for them to do more than merely survive in a climate of rapid and continual change. That there is little available currently to present and prospective classroom teachers presents an opportunity, and perhaps even an obligation, to teacher educators.

Teacher education programs will need to be framed in such a way that paradox is managed skilfully by their graduates. In this study, teachers present themselves as autonomous and empowered survivors who are somewhat immune from many change efforts. The paradox here is that teachers are likely to be able to maintain their sanity, keep stress at a manageable level and retain their focus on students and classroom relationships, while systemic expectations of teacher behaviour may not always be met because of the same immune system. This situation, through a feedback loop, is likely to mean that even larger doses of 'vaccine' will be required for teachers who are troubled by the tension between the two domains of their work within the education system.

If Sungalia (1991, p.16) is right that "the quality of teaching and learning in an educational system can only be improved from within the system, from within the classroom, from within the heart and mind of the teacher who is determined to teach so that students do learn all that they possibly can", then our teachers ought to be helped to identify those practices which are critical for such quality teaching and learning. What is more, they should be empowered further to defend and protect those practices, while adding new dimensions to their pedagogical repertoires as appropriate. Teacher educators will only be able to assist future teachers in these activities if they are themselves, first, aware of the new realities of teachers' work lives in the latter 1990s; and second, able to both use and impart theories of action (such as that suggested in Smyth, 1988) appropriate for teachers operating within the dynamic complexity of the current and future educational context.

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